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SIDE, CORY SMITH, KSAT 12 NEWS. THANK YOU, CORY. SHOULD THE LEGAL FEES OF POLICE AND FIRE FIGHTERS BE PAID FOR BY THE CITY? AS PART OF ITS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, THEY ARE PAID. BUT WHEN THOSE CONTRACTS EXPIRE IN SEPTEMBER, THE CITY WANTS THAT IS BENEFIT THROWN OUT. AS ISIS ROMERO EXPLAINS IT'S ALL PART OF AN ONGOING AND HEATED NEGOTIATION PROCESS BETWEEN BOTH SIDES. THE FIGHT OVER POLICE AND FIRE FIGHTER CONTRACTS TAKES ANOTHER TURN TODAY AS PART OF NEGOTIATIONS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY. THE CITY IS PROPOSING THAT THEY NO LONGER PAY THE LEGAL FEES FOR POLICE, FIRE FIGHTERS, AND THEIR DEPENDENTS. YOU LOOK AT HOW RICH THE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS ARE FOR THE POLICE AND FIRE FIGHTERS, WHEN COMPARED, WHEN YOU LOOK AT HEALTH CARE, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF THESE WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED SMALLER ITEMS, EXTINGUISH REIMBURSEMENT AND THE LEGAL FEES ARE PRIME EXAMPLES. THE CITY SAYS THEY SPEND ABOUT \$32 PER EMPLOYEE FOR MONTH, A COST OF ABOUT \$1 \$1.5 MILLION PER YEAR THAT. MONEY GOES INTO A TRUST WHICH UNIFORMED EMPLOYEES AND THEIR DEPENDENTS CAN USE FOR ANY LEGAL MEANS NECESSARY. THAT MEANS USING IT TO PAY FOR JOB-RELATED LAWSUITS OR EVEN PERSONAL ONES, LIKE A DIVORCE, D.U.I., OR PERSONAL DISPUTE. CHRIS STEELE, PRESIDENT OF THE SAN ANTONIO PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION, SAYS THERE IS AN EXPLICIT NEED WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT FOR THIS BENEFIT. AS FIRE FIGHTERS AND POLICE OFFICERS, WE ARE TOLD THAT WE'RE ON DUTY 24 HOURS A DAY. SO

IF I'M A PARENT, I'M A PARAMEDIC, AND SOMETHING HAPPENS, I GOT TO STOP AND PERFORM AID, BUT I NEED A LEGAL PLAN THAT COVERS ME AND MY FAMILY. NOW, AS THESE CONTRACTS CURRENTLY STAND, THESE LEGAL FEES ALSO HELP SETTLE THE WILLS OF PERSONNEL WHO ARE KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY. NOW, THIS IS JUST ONE ASPECT UNDER NEGOTIATIONS RIGHT NOW. AS WE HAVE BEEN REPORTING PREVIOUSLY, THE BIGGEST PART BEING DEBATED IS HEALTH CARE COSTS AND PREMIUMS FOR UNIFORMED EMPLOYEES. A MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL

SAN ANTONIO - The fight over police and firefighter contracts took another turn on Monday, after the City of San Antonio proposed that it no longer pay the legal fees of police, firefighters and their dependents.

As part of the collective bargaining agreement, they are currently paid, but when the current contract expires at the end of September, the city wants the benefit thrown out.

“You look at how rich the collective bargaining agreements are for the police and firefighters,” said Jeff Londa, co-chief negotiator for the City of San Antonio. “There are a number of these, what might be called smaller items, like tuition reimbursement and the legal fees. They are just prime examples.”

The city’s negotiators say it spends \$32 per employee per month on legal fees for uniformed employees, at a total cost of \$1.5 million per year.

The money goes into a trust, which uniformed employees and their dependents can use for off-duty legal assistance, such as wills or trusts, divorces, or other personal disputes.

“The one thing that helps widows and children left behind from public safety workers killed in the line of duty, they don’t want us to have,” said Michael Helle, president of the San Antonio Police Officers Association.

Legal services may not be used to pay for lawsuits or disputes against the City of San Antonio.

Chris Steele, president of the San Antonio Professional Firefighters Associations, said there is a need within the department for the benefit.

“As firefighters and police officers, we are told we are on duty 24 hours a day,” Steele said. “So if I’m a paramedic, and something happens, I’ve got to stop and perform aid, but I need a legal plan that covers me and my family.”

The debate over legal fees is just one of the items being negotiated; health care costs and premiums for uniformed employees have also been a big source of debate.

A meeting is scheduled for April 15 to discuss health care further.

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